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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: Priority theme: "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons"

Statement submitted by Information Habitat: Where Information Lives, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Information technology, public participation and global agreements

As the information revolution gains momentum – a revolution widely acknowledged to be on the order of magnitude of the industrial revolution, it is critical that the Commission on Social Development and Member States identity ways and means to undertake timely, broad-based and systematic consultations to examine social and other implications and opportunities relating to the adoption and use of information technologies.

The new information technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for broad-based participation in governance at local, national and global levels as well as the possibilities of costs-effectiveness ease of access to public information. However, in the absence of timely public policy initiatives and in the context of rapidly growing adoption of the technologies governed almost exclusively by market forces, there are high risks of

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Federation of Methodist Women; World Movement of Mothers; World Vision International (special consultative status with the Council); Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University; European Union of Women; International Association of Charities; International Council of Psychologists; International Inner Wheel; International Round Table for the Advancement of Counselling (Roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, recall that:

The Heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Social Development stated that "the aim of social integration is to create a 'society for all' in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play";

The Heads of State, in the Copenhagen Declaration, while acknowledging that in different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist, recognize that the family, as the basic unit of society, plays a key role in social development, that as such it should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members, and that it is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support; and that there is an urgent need for policies that strengthen the family and contribute to its stability;

The global conferences of the 1990s referred to the family in similar terms. For example, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development affirms that the introduction of children to the culture, values and norms of society begins in the family, and the International Conference on Population and Development focuses on "the family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

We, therefore,

1. Congratulate the United Nations on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the family was recognized for the first time as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society" and entitled to protection by society and the State.

2. Consider that social integration should be based on four main pillars: social justice, education, eradication of poverty, and respect for human dignity and cultural diversity. Therefore, social integration should also mean adequate recognition of and support for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the poor, illiterate persons, minorities and ethnic groups discriminated against, refugees and migrants, and disabled persons, in order to enable them to participate fully in society.

3. Emphasize that social integration starts in the family and that it is within families and households that persons of different ages and genders interact for the common benefit, where children are reared, nurtured and socialized, where vulnerable members are supported and taken care of. The family is the essential school for human rights education and for

promoting gender equity; it acts as a buffer in cases of adversity, such as illness, unemployment and loneliness, and is a key factor to ensure the integration, social commitment and participation of children and youth. In order to support families in their social roles and functions, family interrelationships and the relationship between human rights and the family must be fully recognized.

4. Underline that social integration is an important factor for the satisfaction of older persons and a pre-condition for dignified ageing.

5. Ask for particular consideration to be given to the direct impingement on families of problems such as poverty, violence, drugs and alcohol dependence, inadequate housing and social services, and migration; and for the family dimension to be linked to issues such as development, social integration, the advancement of women and the responsible use of the environment.

6. Request that special attention be given to families in all countries suffering from great changes mainly due to social transition — among others, the Central and Eastern European countries.

7. Suggest that, in the formulation of family strategies and policies, due attention be given to the multiple responsibilities in family life and child-rearing, with particular emphasis on equal conditions for women and men and on the need to conciliate professional work and family obligations.

8. Wish that the very useful background papers of the two workshops on participation and social justice, organized by the United Nations Secretariat for the Commission, had given due consideration to the family and family-oriented non-governmental organizations as one of the main actors in civil society and as essential links between individuals and the State.

9. Urge that family-specific recommendations contained in international and national legislation and constitutions be fully implemented in all countries.

10. Suggest that the importance of the Subprogramme on the Family within the Division of Social Policy and Development be enhanced so as to encourage and facilitate the exchange of information on supportive policies for families, especially at the local level.

11. Ask that more technical assistance be afforded to the NGO Committees on the Family and that its involvement and active collaboration be recognized by the United Nations offices in New York, Paris and Vienna.

12. Request that the proposed programme of work on the Division for Social Policy and Development for the biennium 1998-1999 (E/CN.5/1997/L.2, 13 February 1997), submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session, also focus on the family dimension in the follow-up activities to the global conferences of the 1990s, particularly on the need to formulate family-sensitive policies and development.